INFORMATION NOTE:

UNITED NATIONS IRAQ-KUWAIT OBSERVATION MISSION (UNIKOM)

Headquarters
Umm Qasr

Duration
April 1991 - to date

Authorized strength
300 military observers

Chief Military Observer
Major-General Günther G. Greindl (Austria)

Historical Background

On 2 August 1990, Iraq invaded and occupied Kuwait. The same day, the United Nations Security Council condemned the invasion and demanded Iraq's immediate and unconditional withdrawal. A few days later, the Council instituted economic sanctions against Iraq. The Council subsequently adopted a number of resolutions on various aspects of the situation and, on 29 November 1990, it decided to give Iraq until 15 January 1991 to implement those resolutions; if not, Member States cooperating with the Government of Kuwait were authorized to use "all necessary means" to uphold and implement the Council's resolutions and to restore international peace and security in the area. The deadline passed and the next day the armed forces of those States began air attacks against Iraq, followed on 24 February by a ground offensive. Hostilities were suspended on 27 February, by which time the Iraqi forces had vacated Kuwait. On 3 April 1991, while still maintaining the economic sanctions against Iraq, the Security Council adopted resolution 687 (1991) which dealt with a number of issues. Following Iraq's acceptance of that resolution's provisions, the cease-fire became a formal one.

Establishment of UNIKOM

By resolution 687 (1991) the Council established, among other things, a demilitarized zone (DMZ) along the boundary between Iraq and Kuwait to be monitored by a United Nations observer unit and requested the Secretary-General to submit to the Council for approval a plan for the unit's immediate deployment. The Secretary-General reported back on 5 April, and on 9 April the Security Council approved his plan for the setting up of UNIKOM (resolution 689 (1991)). It decided further that the modalities for the Mission should be reviewed every six months. The first such review took place on 7 October 1991, when the Security Council concurred with the Secretary-General's recommendation to extend UNIKOM's mandate for another six months, until 9 April 1992.

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The mandate of the Mission is to monitor the Khawr 'Abd Allah waterway between Iraq and Kuwait and the DMZ, based on the border established by the two countries under a 1963 agreement; to deter violations of the boundary through its presence in and surveillance of the demilitarized zone; and to observe any hostile action mounted from the territory of one State to the other. The Khawr 'Abd Allah waterway is about 40 kilometres (25 miles) long. The DMZ, which is about 200 kilometres (125 miles) long, extends 10 kilometres (6 miles) into Iraq and 5 kilometres (3 miles) into Kuwait.

The military observers of UNIKOM are unarmed. UNIKOM does not have the authority or the capacity to take physical action to prevent the entry of military personnel or equipment into the DMZ. The responsibility for the maintenance of law and order rests with the Governments of Iraq and Kuwait in their respective part of the zone. In the DMZ, the police are only allowed sidearms.

UNIKOM's Activities

The UNIKOM advance party arrived in the area on 13 April 1991. By 6 May, the Mission was fully deployed. UNIKOM then monitored the withdrawal of the

armed forces that were still deployed in its assigned zone. That withdrawal having been completed, the DMZ established by the Security Council came into effect at 2000 hours GMT on 9 May, and UNIKOM assumed in full its observation responsibilities.

UNIKOM enjoys full freedom of movement throughout the DMZ and observes the length and breadth of the zone. It verifies that no military personnel and equipment are within the zone and that no military fortifications and installations are maintained in it. For operational purposes, UNIKOM has divided the DMZ into three sectors. Each sector has a headquarters and six observation posts/patrol bases, from which the observers patrol their assigned sectors and visit temporary observation points established in areas of particular activity or where roads and tracks enter the DMZ. In fact, all movements including supply runs are used for observation. UNIKOM patrols the Khawr 'Abd Allah waterway by helicopter and fixed-wing aircraft. There are also air patrols in the DMZ, especially in the southern sector, where mines and unexploded ordnance limit UNIKOM's ability to carry out ground patrols.

Mines and unexploded ordnance have been a serious hazard from the beginning of the Mission. UNIKOM engineers have cleared some 1,100 kilometres of patrol track as well as the sites for observation posts, camps and helicopter pads and disposed of some 7,000 mines and pieces of unexploded ordnance.

Iraqi and Kuwaiti authorities, including police, function in their respective part of the DMZ. However, UNIKOM established the principle that they should maintain a reasonable distance (about 1,000 metres) from the boundary line shown on UNIKOM's map. If their functions should require them to approach closer than 1,000 metres, the authorities are expected to consult UNIKOM in advance. Such consultation enables UNIKOM to take measures to avoid incidents.

UNIKOM headquarters is located at Umm Qasr. The Mission maintains liaison offices in Baghdad and Kuwait City and a logistic base at Doha (Kuwait).

Violations and Complaints

Since the DMZ came into effect on 9 May 1991, UNIKOM has observed three types of violations: minor incursions on the ground by small groups of soldiers; overflights by military aircraft; and the carrying by policemen of weapons other than sidearms. UNIKOM has also investigated a number of complaints by Iraq and Kuwait.

Composition

UNIKOM has an authorized strength of 300 unarmed military observers from the following countries: Argentina, Austria, Bangladesh, Canada, China, Denmark, Fiji, Finland, France, Ghana, Greece, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Kenya, Malaysia, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, Poland, Romania, Senegal, Singapore, Sweden, Thailand, Turkey, Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America, Uruguay and Venezuela. Administrative and logistic support is provided by Canada (engineers), Chile (helicopters), Denmark (logistics) and Norway (medical). Two fixed-wing aircraft made available by the Government of Switzerland are operated by civilians.

Initially, to provide essential security during the setting-up phase, UNIKOM included five infantry companies, drawn from the United Nations Peace-keeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) and the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). These companies were withdrawn by the end of June 1991.

Financial Aspects

The costs of the operation are met by the assessed contributions of the UN Member States. For the first six months of the Mission, the General Assembly authorized expenditures of $61 million. The cost of maintaining the Mission for another period of six months, until 9 April 1992, is estimated at approximately $40 million.

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